

Ritu
weds
Chandni



AMEYA
NARVANKAR

Ritu weds Chandni

AN ILLUSTRATED STORYBOOK
FOR CHILDREN

Project II

**The visibility & representation of LGBT
(Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender)
in Indian society**

July - Nov 2015

Guide

Prof. Sudesh Balan

Ameya Narvankar

146250007

M. Des 2014 -2016

Visual Communication

IDC, IIT Bombay

DECLARATION

I declare that this written submission represents my ideas in my own words and where others' ideas or words have been included, I have adequately cited and referenced the original sources. I also declare that I have not misrepresented or fabricated or falsified any idea/date/fact/source in my submission. I understand that any violation of the above will cause a disciplinary action by the Institute and also can evoke penal action from the sources which have not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.

Ameya Narvankar,
146250007
Industrial Design Centre,
Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay

APPROVAL SHEET

The project titled **The visibility & representation of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender) in Indian society** by Ameya Narvankar, is approved for partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of 'Master of Design' in Visual Communication.

Guide:

Chairperson:

Internal Examiner:

External Examiner:

Date:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my tremendous and heartfelt gratitude to those who have been a part of this project.

Prof. Sudesh Balan, my guide,
for his unparalleled mentorship and valuable feedback at every stage of the project;

Prof. Mandar Rane, Prof. GV Sreekumar & Prof. Raja Mohanty,
for their inputs & suggestions during the group feedback sessions;

Deepa Balsavar, author and illustrator,
for her assistance in translating my vision into a cohesive narrative;

Prof. Nina Sabnani,
for sharing her knowledge on telling a good story and helping shape Ritu and Chandni's tale;

Nitika Mirchandani,
for her timely assistance and networking which allowed me to gather responses from parents and educators;

Aditya Shankar & Aditya Joshi, from **Saathi, IIT-B**,
the student run LGBTQ group on campus,
for their co-operation and support in my understanding of the LGBT community in India;

A heartfelt note of thanks to my classmates **Boski Jain, Rucha Vakhariya & Karan Vohra** who have each contributed in some way in the making of this project;

I also wish to thank all the brave individuals from the LGBT community who dare to lead their lives openly, and inspire and educate us along the way;

&

My Parents and friends, for being an unconditional pillar of strength and support throughout.

ABSTRACT

The Indian LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender) community have for long struggled for their legal rights and acceptance, in a society deeply entrenched in homophobia. With the reinstatement of sec 377 of the Indian Penal Code that criminalises homosexual behaviour, it has led to further discrimination of the community.

It is evident, that we, as a society are conditioned since childhood to conform to certain gender roles and sexual identity. As we grow up, this need to 'otherise' ideas we don't understand takes over and homophobia raises its ugly head. It is the need of the hour to break this cycle and educate our future generations on this much existent reality of our times.

The resources available to achieve this are minimal and for children, quite rare. The mainstream has shied away from accurate representation and often the depictions have been cruel and downright homophobic.

The project is an effort to add towards the positive representation of the LGBT community through the medium of storytelling.

Ritu & Chandni's story (& struggle) in the form of an **Illustrated Storybook for Children - Ritu weds Chandi** is the outcome of this effort. Little Ayesha observes, questions and tries to make sense of the resistance and stigma faced by her cousin's same-sex wedding, in this tale on how love overcomes all odds.

The following report describes my journey as I broaden my understanding of the LGBT community and subject; and arrive at a design solution that allows me to contribute with the best of my abilities as a visual communicator in a meaningful way to the same.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	01	5. Story Development: Weaving the narrative.....	32
Visibility & Representation.....	02	5.1. Approach	
1. The Indian Scenario: Section 377 in times of democracy.....	03	5.2. Plot structure	
1.1. Gender, Identity and Sexual Orientation		5.3. Characters	
1.2. Homosexuality in India		5.4. Story development	
1.3. Sec 377 in times of democracy		6. Visualisation: Illustrating the story.....	39
1.4. Log Kya Kahenge?		6.1. Storyboard	
1.5. The need for greater visibility & representation		6.2. Layout & text	
2. Shaping young minds: Identifying the potential solution.....	11	6.3. Exploration in illustration style	
2.1. Breaking the cycle:		6.4. The chosen direction	
Introducing children to gender & sexual minorities		7. Production: Printing the book.....	48
2.2. Education vs Indoctrination		7.1. Title of the book	
2.3. Impact of stories on children		7.2. Book size	
2.4. Proposition		7.3. Printing	
3. LGBT media & literature: A review of available content for children.....	16	Conclusion.....	52
3.1. Books, film & television		Bibliography.....	54
3.2. Comparative approach analysis of 'King & King', 'And Tango makes Three' & 'Talking of Muskaan'			
4. Views & Opinions: Primary research and analysis.....	24		
4.1. Saathi @ IITB, Events			
4.2. Questionnaire for parents & educators			
4.3. Analysis of responses : Qualitative vs Quantitative			
4.4. The proposed outcome			

Introduction

Over the last decade, the international community saw a momentous change in the acceptance and tolerance of sexual minorities. Archaic laws which once discriminated against the community were replaced with ones that now allow them to lead their lives with freedom, dignity and equality.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual & transgender individuals became more visible and vocal in public life, thus, accelerating this social change.

The LGBT community in India too, began to step out of the shadows and tried to find their voice and place in society. Despite the existence of sec 377¹ and the stigma associated with homosexuality in Indian culture, many of

these fearless individuals continue to lead their lives openly; and in the process, educate the society on gender, identity and orientation.

A considerable amount of projects have been undertaken by many within the community as well as allies to sensitise the Indian masses on the subject. This project aims to add to their efforts by fostering diversity in terms of gender and sexuality; and portraying the reality & normality of LGBT lives.



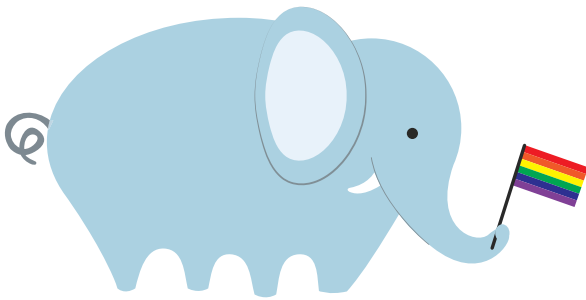
If I get to see myself on screen,
then I know that I exist.

- Gabourey Sidibe²

1. **Sec 377:** Sec 377 of the Indian Penal Code, an archaic British law that criminalises sexual activities "against the order of nature" punishable by imprisonment up to ten years and liable to fine.

2. **Gabourey Sidibe:** Academy Award nominee 2010 for Best Actress in the film 'Precious' on the importance of diversity and representation in popular culture.

Visibility and Representation



The elephant in the room

Homosexuality has always been a hush-hush topic of discussion in modern India. However, times are now changing. With the advent of technology and social media, the LGBT movement in India has found a greater voice.

The mainstream media, however, has shied away from *actively* discussing the issue. Often the issue is only covered when there is an update on the sec 377 verdict, someone from the community is harassed or a politician is making absurd statements on gay rights.

It is necessary to understand that, the judiciary process alone would not rid India of the deeply rooted homophobia. Parallel efforts must be undertaken by the media to keep the discussion alive and advocate social equality.

Media representation

To move towards a more progressive and diverse society, inclusion and representation of minority groups in all walks of life is required.

When the LGBT community see themselves in media and in popular culture, it validates their self-identity; and it helps the rest of the society understand that the LGBT persons are not really that different from anyone else.

The motivation behind the project

The portrayal of LGBT in popular Indian media has been few and far between, and in most cases, the depictions have been cruel and downright homophobic. As someone who grew up on a staple of Bollywood films and TV, the caricaturish and stereotypical representations always bothered me. I felt, this irresponsible portrayal, in turn, led to

stigmatisation and further discrimination of the LGBT community.

The project started off as an activist's response to a very personal agenda to see accurate portrayal and representation of gay and lesbian characters & their stories. With this project, I wish to contribute to the LGBT movement in India using my abilities as a visual communicator and designer - to lend a voice to their unheard stories, and bring them to life.

I constantly questioned myself how my small efforts to add to the amount of work done in the area would help make a difference. I realised that **more the visibility**, it opens **better representation** avenues which in turn brings greater awareness.

1. **Activism:** Art + Activism, the use of art to further an agenda.

1. THE INDIAN SCENARIO

Sec 377 in times of democracy

- 1.1. Gender, Identity and Sexual Orientation
- 1.2. Homosexuality in India
- 1.3. Sec 377 in times of democracy
- 1.4. *Log Kya Kahenge?*
- 1.5. The need for greater visibility & representation

Gender, Identity & Sexual Orientation

Sex has been and till today remains a taboo topic of discussion in Indian households. A majority of Indian parents are uncomfortable when it comes to discussing sex-related topics with their children.

Brought up with the mindset that talking about sex is 'bad', children too are apprehensive to approach their parents regarding questions on the same. Sex and sexuality education in schools also happens at a very later age and often, children shy away from asking questions and doubts to their teachers. They are less inhibited when it comes to talking about it with their peer groups or elder siblings who become their scattered sources of information on the subject.

With the ready access to the Internet, today, they can be easily overwhelmed by the volume of available information. Before they expand their understanding of the issues and laws affecting the LGBT community, it is necessary to educate them on the basics of gender, identity and orientation.

As I began my work on the subject, I realised that I too had a very limited understanding on gender and sexuality; and that the Western understanding and reasoning did not fully reflect the Indian scenario.

What is homosexuality?

Homosexuality refers to the idea that people can fall in love with members of the same sex; and can be romantically, emotionally and sexually involved with them. The umbrella term LGBT is often used to address members of the community who identify as homosexual.

The terminology

The LGBT community not only encompasses those with a non-heterosexual orientation, but also those who identify themselves with another gender. To understand it better, I shall put forth my understanding of these concepts and their differences, which I gathered upon my study.

- **Biological sex:**

The gender assigned to an individual at birth on the basis of their anatomy.

- **Gender Identity*:**

Refers to how one perceives oneself. It may not always match with the biological sex. A person's outward appearance or behaviour may not always conform with their identity of self.

- **Gender Role**

Gender roles are the societal constructs which dictate how an individual should behave or act according to their perceived gender. Our Indian society runs upon these constructs even today which in my view are deterrent to our social development.

- **Gender Expression**

It is an extension of our gender identity, the way we present ourselves and behave in society. The expression of an individual may not always be in sync with their self-identity due to the fear of being singled out & judged by the society.

- **Sexual Orientation**

An individual's sexual orientation is determined in relation to the sex to which they are attracted; it can be broadly divided into three categories - homosexuality (attraction towards the same sex), heterosexuality (attraction towards the opposite sex) and bisexuality (attraction towards both the sexes).

Asexuality refers to the lack of sexual orientation and can be considered as a variation of sexual orientation alongside the other three.

LGBTQ + H

Lesbian - women attracted to other women

Gay - men attracted to other men, the term is also sometimes used to address both men & women

Bisexual - attraction towards members of both sexes

Transgender - the assigned sex of the person may not always align with their **gender identity***

Queer or **Q**uestioning - an individual who may be struggling with or questioning their identity and orientation

Hijra - *hijras* or eunuchs, a much visible part of Indian culture do not subscribe to the western taxonomy of gender classification.

On 15th April, 2014, the Supreme Court of India recognised hijras as a third gender, which is a welcome step in the right direction.

In India, the acronym is expanded to **LGBTQH** to include these minority groups as well.

Homosexuality in India

It is difficult to gauge how much of our population falls under the LGBT spectrum due to the regressive sec 377 of the Indian Penal Code. The archaic British law criminalises sexual activities “against the order of nature” and has made homosexuality punishable by imprisonment up to ten years and liable to fine.

In addition, religion plays an important role here and is what people respond to; and all the representatives of the various religions have unequivocally come out against homosexuality calling it a sin. This has further pushed the LGBT individuals in the closet and made them a persecuted minority.

The patriarchal gender constructs and inherent sexism in the country, has in some way also added to the prejudice against homosexuality. The media portrayals too have not always reflected the reality and led to further ridicule and antagonisation of the community in India.

But was this always the case?

Homosexuality is often dismissed as a Western influence but how are people oblivious to the fact that sec 377 is a dated law from 1860 introduced during the British rule.

Homosexuality in Ancient India

There have been several instances of LGBT and queer themes in Hindu myths and stories. These stories reflect that the ancient Indian society was more tolerant and all-embracing to those different. The gods themselves took upon male and female avatars from time to time in these stories.

So when exactly did homosexuality become a grave sin in our country?

‘Kamasutra’ - the ancient Indian text on human sexual behaviour has references to same-sex love as well. Why is it that sex is a taboo topic in India? The main challenge that laid ahead of me in my project was **talking about homosexuality to an audience who is afraid to even speak about sex openly.**



Illustrations by Devdutt Pattanaik¹ from his book *Shikhandi²: And Other Tales They Don't Tell You*

¹ & ². *Shikhandi: And Other Tales They Don't Tell You* by Devdutt Pattanaik, Penguin India
An illustrated account of Queer themed tales & stories from Indian mythology that debunks the myth that homosexuality is a western import.

The modern day India

Owing to the stigma attached to it and the existence of sec 377, many individuals continue to remain in the closet and lead dual lives.

The community has undergone through all forms of social, economic and political discrimination. They do not enjoy the same fundamental human rights that the Indian Constitution promises every citizen. The second class citizen treatment does not end here. People brave enough to lead their lives openly are targeted, attacked and violated. The existence of sec 377 stops the victims from coming forward and emboldens the attackers.

And this is just the situation in the metropolitan cities. The human right violations against LGBT individuals in the rural areas of India remain unaccounted for.

After the decriminalisation of homosexuality in July 2009, many of these closeted individuals began to come out and lead their lives openly. However, the Supreme Court of India, took a

step backward & recriminalised homosexuality in December 2013. This regressive decision of the SC was panned by the community and allies alike. A 'No Going Back' campaign was launched by the LGBT community who refused to be invisible and hide once again.

The liberal media stood in support and tried to raise more awareness on the issue. Case in point, Bollywood actor Aamir Khan's television show on social issues - 'Satyameva Jayate' has aired episodes focusing on LGBT issues. Social media has been consistent with their coverage of LGBT issues assuring us that the gay rights movement in India is not just a passing trend.

Host Aamir Khan & Sridevi with LGBT activist Harish Iyer on *Satyameva Jayate*

No Going Back: A group of Indian activists protest against the reinstatement of sec 377 on December 11, 2013. AFP



Sec 377 in times of democracy

History of Sec 377

Chapter XVI, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code states that,

377. Unnatural offences: Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine¹

Introduced during the Colonial rule in India in 1861, it criminalises sexual activities “against the order of nature”, arguably including homosexual acts. It can be noted that homosexuality is observed and has been documented in several animal species as well. However, religion, not science; is what people respond to in our country, wherein all the religious leaders have come together to take a united stand against homosexuality.

The law ever since has been used to blackmail & perpetuate violence against the community.

The historic Delhi High Court ruling

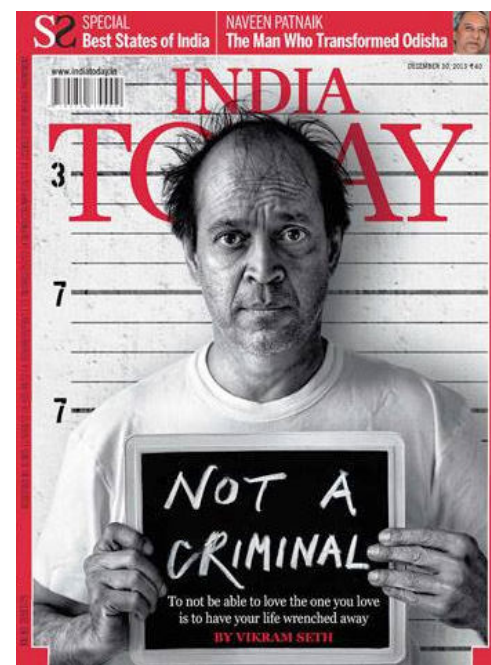
On July 2, 2009, in the case of Naz Foundation v National Capital Territory of Delhi², the High Court of Delhi struck down much of Sec 377 of the IPC as being unconstitutional. This decision was much welcomed by the community but the fight was not over yet.

The SC reversal

In a dark day for democracy, on December 11, 2013, the Supreme Court of India reversed the HC judgement, effectively recriminalizing homosexual activity. They deemed that the law is not unconstitutional, affects a minuscule minority and that parliament could amend the law, if it sees fit.

As the rest of the world continues to repeal and abolish laws that once persecuted the community, India seems to have taken a step backward. Political leaders in power continue to remain mum on the subject in fear of displeasing their vote banks; and those who do flip-flop on their statements effectively not taking a strong stand.

India is the biggest democracy in the world yet a significant part of the population continue to be tagged as criminal for being born this way.



Author **Vikram Seth**³ on the cover of India Today. December 2013 after the SC reversal on sec 377

1. 377. Unnatural offences: Wikipedia., (2015). Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. Retrieved 18 September 2015, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Section_377_of_the_Indian_Penal_Code

2. Naz Foundation v National Capital Territory of Delhi: a landmark Indian case, filed by Naz Foundation, a New Delhi based NGO that works on HIV/AIDS and sexual health. It resulted in the decriminalisation of homosexual acts involving consenting adults, in the jurisdiction of the Delhi High court.

3. Vikram Seth: Indian author and poet known for his bestseller 'A Suitable Boy'. He has been vocal when discussing his own sexuality and has been one of the leaders in the campaign against sec 377

Log kya kahenge?

The '*log kya kahenge?*' (what will people say?) mentality is at large in India. Due to our conditioning and reinforcement of gender roles since childhood, a person struggling with their sexuality will find it difficult to accept their own sexuality. Coming-out to the family is a much later ordeal. The family too, if they accept their child would again be affected by the '*log kya kahenge?*' syndrome.

The solution

I might be oversimplifying things a bit here but I believe greater visibility is the most apt solution here.

Seeing out-gay people be successful in all walks of life and lead respectable, balanced lives is validating their identity as an equal worthy being. Also seeing the fact that these out individuals are accepted by their peers is empowering and assuring, for both the gay individual and their family.

The impact of visibility and representation

Mass media is the fourth pillar of democracy. It has the power to reach out and bring in a behavioural change in society.

Contemporary media in India has ushered in LGBT visibility and representation by bringing in LGBT individuals to the mainstream audience. However, we should not mistake minimal representation for positive representation. Bollywood, our *lingua franca*, has done more harm than good with its portrayal of gay characters. These characters are more often than not included just for comic relief and are reduced to stereotypes.

In recent times, new-age filmmakers have attempted to responsibly portray homosexual characters on screen. No more are they just fashion designers or hairdressers, they are also doctors, engineers, architects, actors and so on which is a reality of our times. Just like heterosexual people, homosexual men & women are multi-dimensional people who can exhibit multiple traits and characteristics.

In the absence of such LGBT role-models, closeted individuals would be afraid to come-out in fear of being rejected by society. They would feel disconnected from the world. Greater visibility and positive representation will allow us to move towards a more inclusive society.

Importance of representation

- **Source of validation**
Stronger sense of self and affirmation of self identity which can boost one's confidence.
- **Education**
The outlook of society and our prejudiced laws would undergo change only when people are exposed to the reality and normality of LGBT lives.
- **Role models**
Children can relate and look up to; show kids that it is okay to be different.

- **Change perceptions**
LGBT individuals in the limelight, can change the perception that a gay person would have a predetermined level of success and opportunity because of their orientation.
- **New perspective**
The representation of minority groups has always been an effective way of bringing a whole new way of looking at things.
- **Combats heteronormativity**
Fights against the idea that a certain identity is normal & something against it is not.

2. SHAPING YOUNG MINDS

Identifying the potential solution

- 2.1. Breaking the cycle: Introducing children to gender & sexual minorities
- 2.2. Education vs Indoctrination
- 2.3. Impact of stories on children
- 2.4. Proposition

Breaking the cycle

It has been established that homosexuality is natural and that some individuals are born this way, but the real question is — Are we born homophobic?

I began to browse the Internet and read on efforts undertaken by the community to combat homophobia and sensitise the masses. Numerous films and books on the subject have been made, that are both thought-provoking and entertaining. While these cater to the adult LGBT individuals, I found out there is not much content available for the younger audience, that is relevant to their age. And if it exists, it is from a Western perspective.

Bullying - a playground reality

Actual or perceived sexual identity remains a prime bullying point in schools. 'Gay' & 'homo' are used as insults by bullies for their classmates. It is important to understand from where children pick up these prejudices from.

For example, children are taught from the start to stay away from *hijras* and show disdain towards them. There is a need to educate them on why & how they are pushed to resort to begging and prostitution.

It is evident so far, that we as a society are conditioned since childhood to conform to a certain standard. Anything which strays away from the heteronormative is bad, being different is bad, homosexuality is bad. As we grow up, this need to 'otherise' ideas we don't understand takes over and homophobia raises its ugly head.

How do we go about changing this? How do we break the cycle?

The apt way is to inculcate a sense of diversity and openness towards the LGBT community in young children; and molding their young minds. But that is easier said than done, when parents have their own pre-conceived notions prevalent. Also the fact, that sec 377 is still in place adds to their apprehensions.

To combat this, it is important to start a dialogue with both parents and children. Efforts have to be made by both parents and teachers to sensitise the children and help them make informed choices. By shielding children away from homosexuality, we are masking a reality.

Children are impressionable and more open minded. If they begin to get exposure and see it as "normal" at a young age, then they're likely to grow up to be accepting and kind. In any case, school children do know about it from scattered sources, so might as well educate them properly.

The collective empathy of children and their parents can help make a vast difference and lead to a more inclusive society.

Education vs Indoctrination

There is often a misconception amongst society that homosexuality is an adult topic of discussion and by speaking to children about it, we are trying to further the gay agenda. Some people even believe that by making them aware of it, their minds would get 'corrupted' and that they would turn 'gay'. These reasonings are clearly the product of indoctrination of homophobic ideas.

It is important to distinguish that the aim of my project is to educate children and make them aware about the LGBT community.

As a designer, it is my role to show the children how to think rather than what to think.

Once they are introduced to and made aware of something, only then they can comprehend and further understand it. The idea is to inculcate a sense of critical thinking and questioning attitude within the children and help them come to the realisation that every person irrespective of race, caste, gender,

sexuality has the right to lead their life with dignity and freedom.

If this is the way to proceed, then why have attempts not been made to do so yet?

A. It is considered an 'adult' theme. It is not easy to discuss sexuality in a society which is afraid to talk about sex openly.

&

B. Fear of moral policing & violence prevents people from coming ahead to discuss it. Also nobody wants to be the first to deal with the controversy that is to follow.

My next step was to explore the different ways I could adopt to impart this information. I gauged my capabilities and skills as a visual communicator and came up with the following solutions:

- Designing original content and resources that speak in an Indian context
- Creating relatable stories and imagery
- Building multidimensional LGBT characters; while acknowledging their sexuality I do not let it define them solely

- Films, comic strips, books, animation, video games, art, installations, etc

Storytelling, I believed was the most appropriate way for me to go ahead in bringing the educational message without making it sound too preachy. My ability as a visual designer would come in to play here too, as I would create visuals and weave them in with the narrative to engage the children.

Impact of stories on children

Stories are a great tool to capture the attention of young children and at the same time, impart a social message. While fairytales could have been an interesting way of approach, I believed that it would be taking away the Indian context from it and not really mirror the LGBT life in India. While true stories can be powerful, children might not fully relate with them. I decided to go with the realistic fiction' route.

The stories I was to come up with in addition to having a central LGBT theme would also :

- Encourage the child's **creativity & propel imagination**.
- Shape a child's **moral reasoning** & teach them the difference between good and evil at an early stage in life.

- Children, make certain **connections & identify with each character** in the stories. They place themselves in their shoes and relate it with their own anxieties, dreams and aspirations. They also look up to these characters as role-models.
- If parents especially read the stories with them, they can create an even **stronger parent and child bond**. A child struggling with his/her gender or sexual identity would be more comfortable confiding in to his/her parents about it.

PROPOSITION

To create & design fictional content for children, youth & families;
that speak on gender, orientation and identity in an Indian context.

3. LGBT MEDIA & LITERATURE

A review of available content for children

3.1. Books, film & television

3.2. Comparative approach analysis of 'King & King',
'And Tango makes Three' & 'Talking of Muskaan'

Resources for children

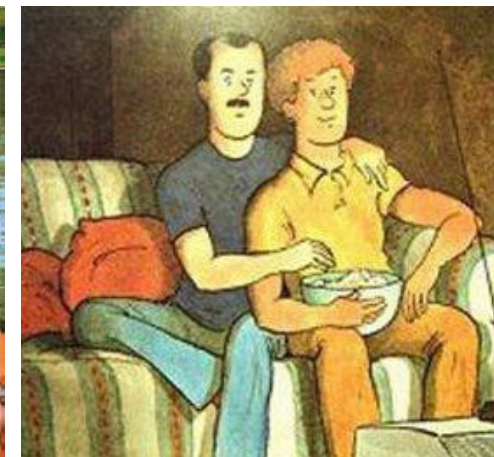
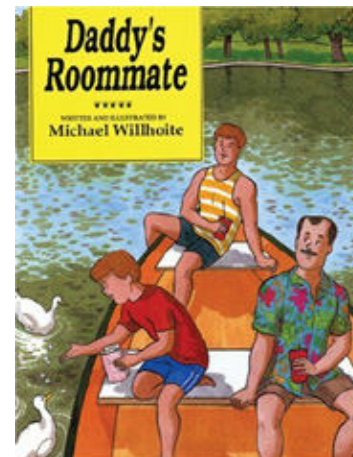
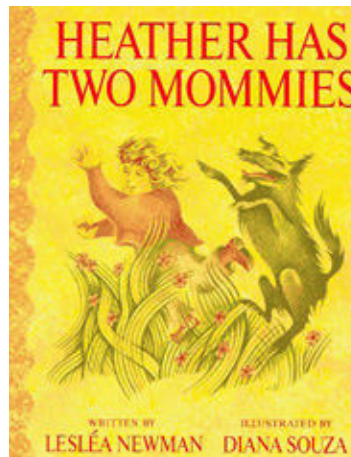
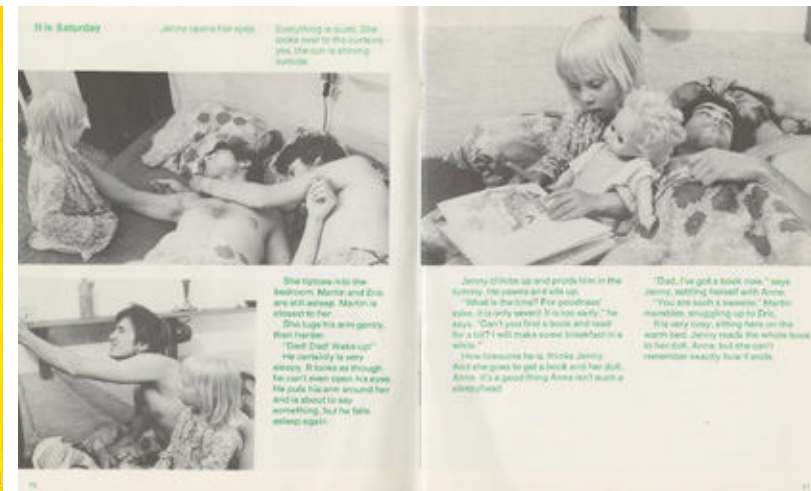
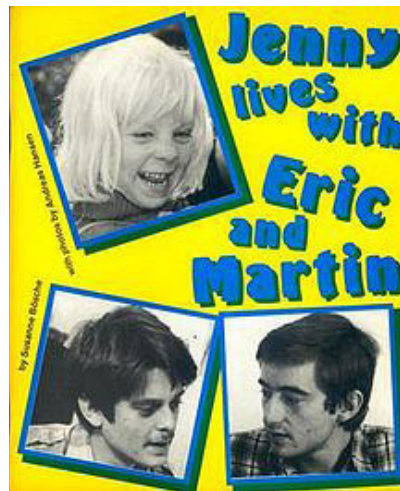
The next step was to browse through the already available resources for children and analyse their approach. I decided to solely focus on content with a strong underlying LGBT or queer theme, catered to children.

Again, I had yet to finalise my age group for the project. So, I specifically looked for content that was more appropriate for even younger age groups. Not just the content but even the tone and language would drastically change when speaking to young children over teenagers.

Children's books

There are several children's books on the subject from Western authors which explore alternate family structures and speak on same-sex parenting.

'Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin(1981)', 'Heather has Two Mommies(1989)² and 'Daddy's Roommate(1991)³ are some of the earliest books that addressed homosexuality.



1. **Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin:** Susanne Bösche(author); Andreas Hansen (photography), Gay Men's Press
2. **Heather has Two Mommies:** Lesléa Newman (author); Diana Souza, Dana Kingsbury (illustrator), Alyson Books
3. **Daddy's Roommate:** Michael Willhoite (author & illustrator), Alyson Books

These books obviously attracted criticism and controversy during the time they were published, and are not readily available even today. An interesting point to note would be that the books would show the same-sex couples in physical contact - embracing or sleeping in a bed together

Another point to note would be that these books featured exclusively Caucasian same-sex couples. Similar books were published later on that explored cross-cultural and multiracial same-sex relationships.

I tried to find if similar content had been adapted to feature Indians, but in vain. I came to the conclusion that same-sex parenting approach would not really work in our context. With homosexuality itself being illegal, the talk of same-sex families is a distant dream.

Fairytales explored the idea of homosexuality with titles like 'King & King(2002)⁴' and 'The Princes & the treasure (2014)⁵'. The characters are involved romantically and even kiss in these books, a common theme in fairytales.

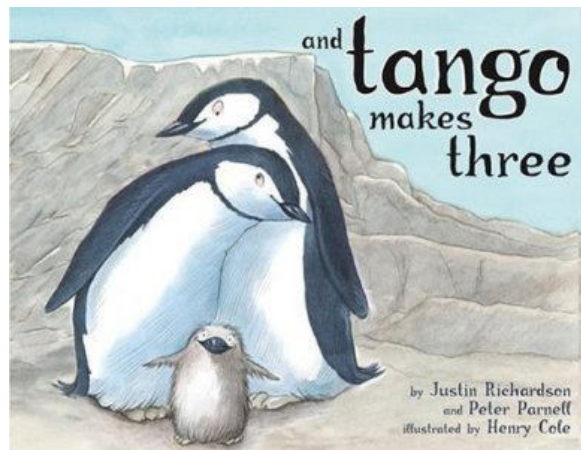
'King & King' sees a Queen trying to find the perfect Princess for her son. But the prince falls in love with another prince instead. They end up marrying towards the end. The book also features the first gay kiss in a children's book. It had a follow up book - 'King & King & Family' which adopts the previously mentioned approach of same-sex parenting.

'The Princes & the treasure' is the story of two princes who met for a quest, worked together, and ultimately fell in love



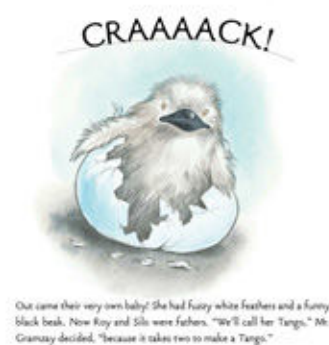
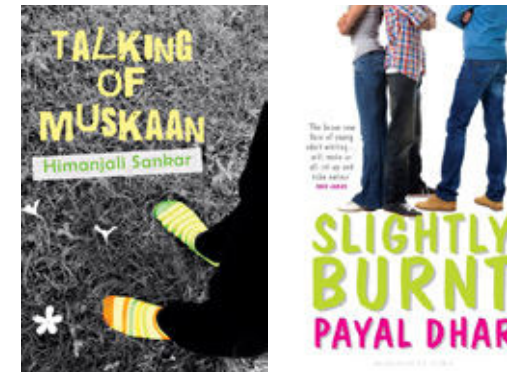
-
4. **King & King:** Linda De Haan, Stern Nijland (author & illustrator), Tricycle Press
5. **The Princes & the treasure:** Jeffrey A. Miles (author); J.L.Phillips (illustrator), Handsome Prince Publishing

Possibly the most well known LGBT themed children's book and a subject of worldwide controversy would be 'And Tango makes Three(2005)^{6/} - a true story about two male penguins raising a baby chick in New York's Central Zoo. Conservatives believed that by asserting the naturalness of homosexuality in animals, the author was trying to further the gay agenda. For this reason, it has found its way on the list of most banned books of all time.



With the lack of Indian children's books on the subject I decided to look at the teen fiction section and to my surprise found a couple of books - 'Talking of Muskaan(2014)^{7/} & 'Slightly Burnt(2014)^{8/} that have a central LGBT theme.

Most of these titles can be purchased in India from online book stores.

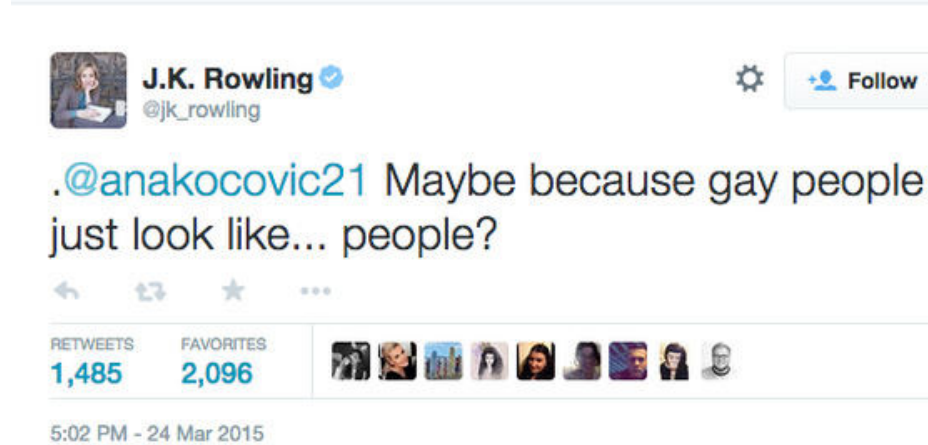
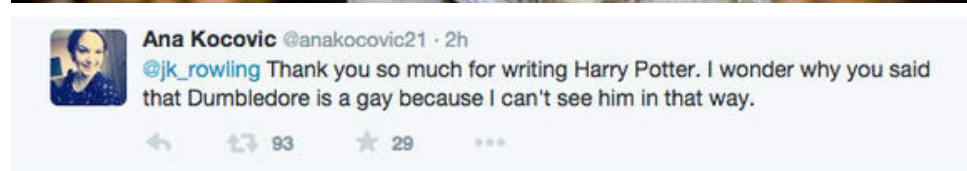


-
- 6. **And Tango makes Three:** Peter Parnell, Justin Richardson (author); Henry Cole (illustrator), Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers
 - 7. **Talking of Muskaan:** Himanjali Sankar (author), Duckbill Books
 - 8. **Slightly Burnt:** Payal Dhar (author), Bloomsbury India

Film & Television

Mainstream cinema and television too have adopted a similar approach and focused on same-sex parents or ambiguously queer characters when speaking on the issue.

Albus Dumbledore from Harry Potter has been confirmed by J. K. Rowling to be a homosexual. While the reveal was done much after the series was over, it did amount to something as Dumbledore is one of the most famous and iconic characters in children's literature.



Even after almost a decade since she revealed Dumbledore is gay, Harry Potter author **J. K. Rowling** continues to defend her decision - "It has certainly never been news to me that a brave and brilliant man could love other men. He is my character. He is what he is and I have the right to say what I say about him."

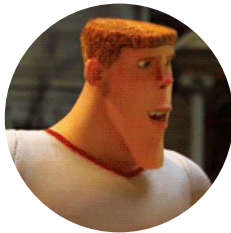
Retrieved from, https://twitter.com/jk_rowling/status/580414479604822016



Mr. Simmons(left) from Hey Arnold!, Nickelodeon



The two lesbian moms, Susan and Cheryl, on an episode of **Good Luck Charlie**, Disney Channel



You're gonna love my boyfriend.
He's like a total chick flick nut.

- Mitch (Paranorman)

Children oriented media has been always dicey when it comes to explicitly revealing a character is gay and often one has to read between the lines. For example, the children's cartoon 'Hey Arnold!'⁹ (aired in India as well) had a teacher Mr. Simmons which the creator later revealed was gay. The show never directly spoke or commented on his sexuality, the students loved him anyway. Perhaps, there is nothing wrong in keeping it ambiguous because once it is addressed as a separate issue the discrimination is evident. But if we just include LGBT in our mainstream and interact as we normally do, that sends out a stronger message.

Another instance in recent times would be 'Paranorman'¹⁰. It features a character who is perhaps the first openly gay character in an animated children's movie: Mitch, who is a jock and not stereotypically gay at all. The audience doesn't even know Mitch is gay until he mentions that he has a boyfriend towards the very end of the film.

'Good Luck Charlie'¹¹ a children's show on Disney Channel also featured a lesbian couple in an episode, a first for Disney.

9. **Hey Arnold!:** an American animated television series created by Craig Bartlett for Nickelodeon

10. **Paranorman:** a 2012 American 3D stop-motion animated horror comedy film for children, produced by Laika

11. **Good Luck Charlie:** an American family sitcom by Phil Baker and Drew Vaupen, that aired on Disney Channel

Back home, there was barely any content I could find which could be suitable for viewing by young children. 2013 saw the release of Bombay Talkies - an anthology of four short films from mainstream Bollywood filmmakers. It featured not one but two stories with queer content. One of the them - *Sheila ki Jawaani*¹², tells the story of a young boy who dresses and dances like his idol *Sheila* (Katrina Kaif) much to the chagrin of his disapproving father. It was a refreshing story to see that touched the surface of gender and identity issues amongst children.

With the West making strides in LGBT representation for children, Indian media seems to be lagging behind. With the paucity of such content from an Indian perspective it further strengthens the ill-informed mindset that homosexuality is a Western import.



Bollywood star **Katrina Kaif**(left) featured in the item number **Sheila Ki Jawaani** from the film *Tees Maar Khan*
12 year old Vicky (played by **Naman Jain**) emulating his idol Katrina Kaif in Bombay Talkies

12. **Sheila ki Jawaani**: an item number from the film 'Tees Maar Khan'; Zoya Akhtar's film from the anthology 'Bombay Talkies' based on the same

Analysis of approach

'King & King (2002)', by Linda De Haan and Stern Nijland is a story of a young prince who falls in love with another prince after rejecting princesses his mother has chosen for him. Interestingly, one of the princesses the book introduces is Indian, however the portrayal can be deemed a bit problematic. The book has been often used in schools abroad to introduce the topic to children. The illustration style is mixed media collages, very experimental.

'And Tango makes Three (2005)', by Justin Richardson is based on a true story of two male penguins who hatch & parent a baby chick in New York's Central Zoo. It is a touching tale which once again focuses on same-sex parenting but in a different light. The illustrations are in watercolour, quite common in children's books.

'Talking of Muskaan (2014)', by Himanjali Sankar. The central character Muskaan is a lesbian. The story is told from the perspective of three of Muskaan's friends as they narrate incidents which led to her attempting suicide. Reactions of parents and peers captured quite realistically. There is a mention of sec 377 verdict, which is well integrated with the plot.



	King & King	And Tango makes Three	Talking of Muskaan
Age group	4-8	4-8	13-18
Category	Children's book	Children's book	Teen novel
Type	Fairytale	True story	Realistic fiction
Approach	Search for true love, happy marriage ending *a sequel of the book has the two kings adopting a young orphan	Same-sex parenting, alternate family structure	Homophobic bullying, coming-out story
Romantic relationship between gay characters	Yes	Yes	Unrequited love, one-sided romantic attraction
Physical intimacy	Kissing	None	Kissing
Relatability to an Indian audience	None	Moderate, Indian folk tales often have animals as primary characters	High

4. VIEWS & OPINIONS

Primary research and analysis

4.0. Primary research

4.1. Questionnaire for parents & educators

4.2. Analysis of responses : Qualitative vs Quantitative

4.3. The proposed outcome

Initial Research

My primary goal was to get a better idea and understanding of the LGBT culture in India. To serve that purpose, it was necessary to come in contact with and interact with members of the community.

Saathi, IIT Bombay

The first thought was to get in touch with the LGBT support group on the IIT Bombay campus - Saathi. I joined Saathi and began to interact and bond with the other members. An interesting aspect about Saathi is that one is not required to reveal their sexual orientation to become a part of the group. Allies too, are welcomed. They are quite active and have undertaken projects which highlight LGBT issues and their struggles.

I began to help Saathi in these projects and offered my skills as a designer for the same.



A couple of posters I designed for a few events organised by them, including the freshers' orientation at IIT Bombay. In addition, I also helped in the making of the viral 'Mere Saathi' video which spoke on acceptance from allies.

During the process, I gained valuable insights and views which I believe came in to use during the execution of this project.



Q-Fest at The Hive

Exposure to the community made me aware of the various LGBT cultural events in Mumbai, one of them being - Q-Fest'(Queer Fest).

I attended the tenth edition of the Q-Fest which included the screening of 'The L Word' - an American show on the life of lesbians, a discussion on visibility at workplaces which was followed by the main event for the day - Rainbow Mic, a set of stand-up comedy, spoken word poems and musical performances.

Shobhna S Kumar, one of the organisers of the fest jokingly said that she had to screen 'The L Word' because there is barely any Indian content on lesbians. It ringed true with me and I felt I could go in that direction with my story.



With Sushant Divgikar at the Acceptance Meet, meeting a successful openly gay celebrity asserted the need for more representation and visibility

Acceptance Meet

On 15th August 2015, I attended The Acceptance Meet² held at the Holy Family Hospital, Bandra. The event is specifically geared at LGBT youth who are struggling with their sexuality or have come-out to their family. They are encouraged to bring along their family and friends and foster a better understanding amongst them. Experts from various fields initiated a dialogue with those seated in the audience; and allayed their fears and doubts.

It was a beautiful and emotional evening that saw so many people come together with their loved ones and share their stories on the stage. It was also exciting to see visible LGBT television faces like Sushant Divgikar³ and Harish Iyer⁴ be a part of the event.

1. **Q-Fest:** held on the second Sunday of every month at The Hive in Bandra, the fest includes events like film screenings, dance performances, stand-up comedy and panel discussions.

2. **Acceptance Meet:** an event celebrating acceptance, organised by The Humsafar Trust, an LGBT NGO in association with other LGBT groups & organisations in Mumbai including Saathi, IIT Bombay

3. **Sushant Divgikar:** winner of Mr.Gay India 2014, a participant on the 8th edition of the Indian reality TV show Bigg Boss

4. **Harish Iyer:** well known equal rights activist, LGBT spokesperson

Questionnaire

With my proposition in place, the next part of the project was to understand my intended audience better. As homosexuality is still illegal in India, I am not allowed to openly discuss the topic with children. Schools are unwilling to participate. Convent schools consider homosexuality a sin so they do not speak about it. It is difficult to get permission from both parents and teachers to directly speak to the children, so I figured I would start by approaching parents first.

I prepared a questionnaire that is aimed primarily at parents, teachers and educators to understand their views and fears when discussing such a sensitive topic with children. It included questions on if they feel children should even be introduced to the idea of homosexuality, is it even needed; questions on how to deal with bullying and so on.

My main target with the questionnaire was to understand the age group parents feel would be the right age to introduce this topic to their children and through what channel.

A few sample questions:

Are there any openly LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender) friends, colleagues or relatives in your life?

Are you accepting of their sexuality and gender expression?

Would you be comfortable introducing them to your children/students?

Do you think it is necessary for a primary school child to know about the LGBT community? Why?

What do you think is the right age to introduce children to the idea?

- 3-7 years
- 8-12 years
- 12-15 years
- 15+ years

Sample responses

The responses of the parents and teachers gave me an outlook on the reality of raising a child and the concerns faced by them.

Most of my respondents are female, ages 25-45, and almost half the respondents are educators as well. So, the responses might not truly reflect the views of an average Indian parent.

I have broken down the questions into broad categories and summarised their responses.

On LGBT presence and acceptance in their own lives,

A majority of my respondents said that they personally knew LGBT individuals and they accepted them fully.

Comfort in introducing them to their children or having an openly gay teacher teaching their children,

All the respondents answered in the affirmative saying they would have no qualms or hesitation in having LGBT presence in their child's life. Some responses —

"They are close friends and our son already knows them as they part of many get together"

"I would be comfortable. But I would be alert to see if the students have picked up any preconceived notions that are negative or have any prejudices. I would address them peacefully if they crop up."

"Yes.. I would be very comfortable in introducing them to my children as well as students. I think it is as much same as introducing a heterosexual person."

On the need to introduce primary school children to the community,

Most of the respondents believed it was needed as it is a reality of our times.

"Yes. They should know about the community, so that they are well educated about the community and don't get under any wrong notion prevailing in the society."

"Why not.. There is no shame.. so should not be hidden."

Some of the respondents felt that we would be robbing them of their innocence on introducing them to the idea that some people fall in love with members of the same sex.

"Don't feel it's necessary - they could get confused."

"When they are too young to know/ understand abt sex per se wouldnt it be too premature to address sexual orientation?"

The appropriate age to introduce them to the subject,

The respondents were split in their views when it came to this question. None had a definite answer while a few refused to answer and said that it is not required to go all out of the way to specially introduce them to the topic. They will find out on their own in time.

The approach they would adopt,

2/3rd of the respondents believe that direct conversation with the child is the way to go ahead. Some felt that a combination of direct communication and using visual aids + interaction with the LGBT community is a sound approach.

"I would make it a part of my regular interaction & have open conversations to questions asked as the curiosity and comments of other children around them would bring that up."

"Combination of conversation + books and film and (if possible) live introductions and interactions with members of the LGBT community, particularly those who are secure and confident about their sex/sexuality"

On addressing homophobic bullying,

The respondents were asked how they would react to homophobic bullying if their child/student was involved, both as the victim and as the bully itself.

In both cases, the solutions ranged from directly speaking to the children involved and sensitising them, to taking a strict stance against the bullies and awarding appropriate punishment/removal of privileges.

A few solutions:

"Teach child that it is not an insult to be called gay. Have them speak openly about fears and concerns. (I know the right answer here is probably: report to teacher - but I have had bad experiences of reporting bullies to my teachers and so am personally wary of them)"

"I doubt a situation like that would arise, but if it did would explain to my child as well as for the rest of the school as if my child is doing it it is definatly not just my child there will be others."

On visibility & representation of LGBT in popular media for children as a solution,

Almost all the respondents unanimously agreed that having LGBT presence and role-models in popular media for children will help in sensitising them to a great extent.

Analysis : Qualitative vs Quantitative

After gathering the responses, my immediate solution was to look at them quantitatively. I looked at how many of my respondents were in favour of something vs something not. There was also a confirmation bias at play as I was able to get answers I was actively hunting for.

Some of the questions also seemed to be indicative of the same as I had already decided the medium & solution to my problem. It also did not help that my pool of respondents belonged to the same social and economic section of society, and did not reflect the collective Indian society. This was evident from the get-go when they answered in affirmative when asked about acceptance of LGBT in their lives. The faculty also confirmed that there was a confirmation bias, and suggested that perhaps the information received is not meant to be quantifiable. A qualitative analysis of the same was required.

Reading between the lines

I revisited my responses and began to do a more qualitative analysis of the same. At the same time, I began to also wonder and question if a survey was even needed in the first place.

As I did, I gained new insights which I had missed on my first reading. I had to read between the lines to grasp on what few people wished to say and conveyed otherwise. There was also a certain fear of coming across as politically incorrect, so they played safe with the answers. Despite these, I was able to extract some keypoints which were later integrated into my project.

Interests:

- The respondents agree that it is necessary for a child to be exposed to a diverse group of people for their social development

- Respondents aim to raise loving and caring children who respects people from all walks of life despite their own personal views & opinions
- The presence of diverse role models in terms of gender and sexuality in popular media for children, shall help sensitise them towards the community

Concerns:

- The level and amount of information to be conveyed to the child on the subject
- The type & method of information conveyed shall also change according to the age group

The proposed outcome

The different views of the parents gave me a direction to proceed in and helped me finalise the age group I would target. While a majority of them did feel that the 12-15 age group is the right age; they countered themselves when saying they had no qualms introducing primary school children(ages 8-11) to it.

I have come to the conclusion that the most appropriate age group would be 8-11 years, with some parental guidance involved. In a perfect scenario, the story would be collectively read by both parents and children. If the child has further queries, the parent can always provide more information and clear their confusion, if any.

While I was keen on designing a printed children's book for the story, I felt I should speak to more parents and educators and see if a device like an iPad or a tab would be the correct platform to further bring in this parent-child interaction element.

REVISED PROPOSITION

To create & design a fictional storybook for children (ages 8-11) and families; with a central LGBT theme, in an Indian context.

5. STORY DEVELOPMENT

Weaving the narrative

5.1. Approach

5.2. Plot structures

5.3. Characters

5.4. Story development

Approach to story

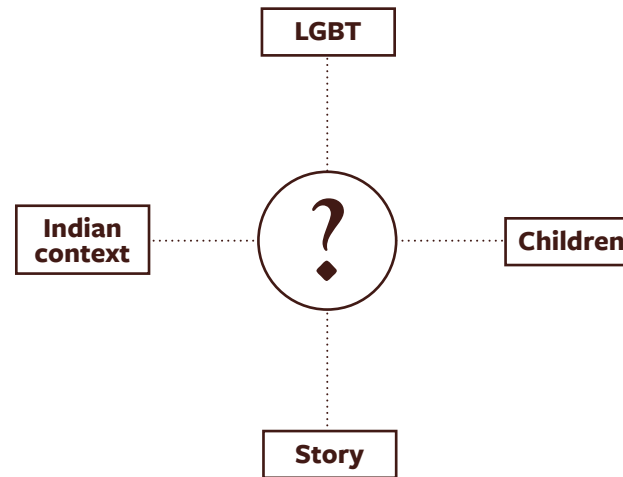
After assessing the information I had gathered, I began working on the story for the children's book. I felt a good approach to go about doing this was to **identify inherently Indian ideas and concepts that are heteronormative in nature, and insert the LGBT narrative in the situation.**

These included content which children are exposed to and are familiar with, from an early age. For eg, Bollywood films, Indian weddings, the Indian freedom struggle, etc.

Inserting the LGBT aspect in such a situation would offer a new perspective and push the child to further question.

Light-hearted yet realistic

I also wanted the approach to be more on the lighter side and not inundate the child with information about the legalities and the hardships faced by the community. At the same time, I did not want to paint too rosy a picture and make it seem unrealistic.



Another point I wanted to focus on was - **acceptance.** Even if the judiciary process were to change, would the LGBT community gain immediate acceptance from the society?

Keeping this in mind, I went with a 'what if?' method and looked at situations which would occur if homosexuality was legalised in India.

What if gays and lesbians could marry?

Would they put out matrimonial ads as well? Would they have extravagant weddings too? Would they shift houses like heterosexual married couples? Whose parents would they move in with? Would they adopt children? How would they raise the child?

These were some of the questions I felt even a child would be curious about. A wedding I felt would be a perfect setting for a child to raise these questions.

'The Big Fat Indian Wedding'

A wedding is a beautiful union of two individuals who vow to spend their lives together forever. In India, it happens on a much grander scale. No Indian wedding is complete without its fair share of song, dance and drama. Bollywood too, has fueled this obsession with larger-than-life weddings. I figured it would be a perfect environment for a children's story wherein a child could interact with a lot of family members and have interesting conversations on same-sex love & marriage.

Plot Structures

Plot 1

A wedding household is in a state of chaos with preparations underway.

A key object - a ring or mangalsutra is lost, hampering the celebratory mood.

- A young child goes to cousin's wedding
- discovers cousin is getting married to the same gender
- questions parents, finds answers at the same time
- a key item required for the wedding goes missing (conflict)
- child plays detective, hunt for missing object
- quizzes the relatives; debate on same-sex love, gender roles
- discover that it was hidden by a relative
- convincing, change of heart, item is found, wedding takes place (resolution)

Plot 2

A bride/groom is off to marry their same-sex partner. They take to the streets with a traditional Indian wedding procession - baraat.

Along the way, they are harassed by the self-proclaimed protectors of Indian culture and society.

Will they safely make it to the venue and get married?

- A young child goes to cousin's baraat
- questions parents, discovers that people are trying to stop the baraat (conflict)
- baraat starts their journey
- hurdle 1 - words made of knives, neighbours make cruel comments
- hurdle 2 - look down upon them, make them feel very small
- hurdle 3 - throw garbage at the baraat, ruined clothes
- persist along, go ahead with wedding anyway (resolution)

While the first plot had more scope to be on the lighter side, I felt it was becoming too preachy. In addition, the LGBT characters were not central to the story. You could replace them with a heterosexual couple and it would still function the same way.

The second plot on the other hand, although linear in structure would introduce a child to the stigma and hardships faced by the LGBT community and how to circumvent around it to lead their lives.

I also felt that it would also give the child a role-model to look up to.

In addition, I could also bring in the little conversations on gender roles and the outlook of society towards it without it becoming the prime focus of the tale.

Keeping in mind the plot progression, the theme of visibility, avenues to reveal relevant information to a child and possibility of interesting visuals, I decided to go ahead with the second plot structure and began to pen down the story.



Characters

Ayesha, the protagonist
Eager to dance in her favourite Ritu didi's baraat

Ritu, Ayesha's cousin
Off to marry **Chandni**,
the love of her life

The Moral Brigade, the villian
Mean grown ups on high horses doing
their best to discourage the baraat

In addition to these primary characters, Ayesha
will have interactions with the other baraatis
including her parents & a sceptical aunt —

Charu Chachi

Story Development

A pre-wedding celebration, a baraat is one of the most recognisable symbols of an Indian wedding. The families get together, there is song and dance, and joy all around.

In case of a gay wedding, the same baraat can be easily compared to a Gay Pride Parade. It would mean much more than a celebration of union of two lives and their families. It would also be a celebration of their identities and of acceptance from their friends and families.

However, knowing our society and the methods they resort to, one would not be surprised if there was resistance to such a wedding procession. The Indian moral brigade have time and time again proclaimed themselves to be saviors of Indian culture and have resorted to extreme measures including violence to express their disdain.

I wanted to highlight the stigma that a same-sex marriage would face in our society and how it would manifest in different forms. All this would be witnessed from the POV of a child who would question why this is happening.

Draft 1:

An excerpt from the first draft of the story,

“Di must be so upset” Ayesha thought.

“That girl is strong. She knew this were to happen. The Moral Brigade have been harassing her and bhaiya & bhabhi since she announced her plan to marry a woman.”

“The Moral Brigade?”

“A group of people on high horses who have self-proclaimed themselves the protectors of Indian culture. They have even threatened to boycott the wedding but Ritu refused to back down. That is why those two policemen are here...to escort the baraat to Chandni’s house. But I don’t think that will be enough to stop the Moral Brigade.”

After penning down the story, I felt it was a tad bit preachy, the language and tone did not seem suited for a child (ages 8-11) and I had failed to capture the perspective of a child. On further discussions with my guide - Prof. Sudesh Balan, who felt that the message of the story seemed more suited for an adult than a child, I decided to rework the story.

He suggested I discuss my story further with **Deepa Balsavar**, a well-known children’s book author and illustrator, based in Mumbai.

Feedback from Deepa Balsavar

I shared the story idea and script with Deepa Balsavar who gave me valuable inputs and helped shape the story further. She also agreed with Prof. Balan's observation, that I was focusing more on the stigma associated with same-sex love and the society. The language and tone too was not suited for a children's book. The use of metaphors (see: Moral Brigade) was dicey and may not be understood by a child immediately. She felt I could either change my target audience to older kids and make it a graphic novel or rework the script so it is more relevant and relatable to a child. She helped me visualise both the scenarios and I believed that I could go ahead with the latter and try and 'fix' the story.

Setting the tone for the narrative

The first task was to work on the language, and use simpler words and short sentences. Next step was to control the information I wished to convey to the child. The unnecessary details were omitted and the result was a lighter, simpler, script. I felt the metaphors would work well alongside their literal illustrations

so I opted to retain them. Deepa too agreed that it would be fine and that it could also masquerade as a message for adults in the form of a children's book. In addition, it would also incite a parent-child dialogue.

Why is the bride on a horse?

Another valid criticism Deepa had was that Ritu, the bride is taking the baraat to the other bride's house on a horse. She felt that I was reinforcing gender stereotypes that even in a same-sex marriage, one of the brides takes upon the role of a man. I whole-heartedly agreed with it but I was not ready to let go of the horse element. I had also discussed my story with Prof. Nina Sabnani, who helped me solve this conundrum. She suggested I can have both the brides on horses, traveling with their respective baraats to a common meeting point. This appealed to me greatly and helped resolve the issue.

The 'bride on a horse' issue was raised once again during a feedback session with the faculty. They suggested I make a pros and cons list to justify my reasoning better.

Pros:

1. Ritu, the bride is a bold and fearless individual who is defying society. Riding to her baraat on a horse asserts her boldness.
2. If she was inside a *doli* or a car, she would not be visible enough for the society & Moral Brigade to see her and react.
3. The horse fits in with the rest of the surreal & metaphorical nature of the narrative.
4. Aesthetically, it gave me a wider scope for illustrating the story as well.

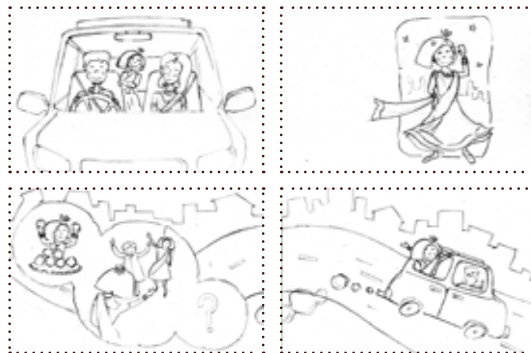
Cons:

1. Reinforcement of gender roles.
2. An open-roof car would fit in with the narrative easily.

The pros outnumbered the cons, and I also felt it would create a stronger imagery and give out a powerful message if the bride were to ride in her baraat on a horse.

As per feedback from Prof. Balan & Deepa, I altered some of the story as well. While the plot structure remained much the same, the way the small child reacts to all the events that happen became the crux of the story. It went from becoming a story of persistence and bravery of the bride, to also the child questioning why the society is hostile to the baraat when they are not doing anything wrong, nor harming anyone.

As I was making changes to the story, I began to visualise it alongside. I made thumbnails for the pages of the book and how they would play with the text.



To rhyme or not to rhyme?

I also wanted to explore if the story could be told in a better way with a rhyming scheme. I did not want it to dictate the narrative but felt I should give it a go.

The introduction of the Moral Brigade changed from,

They were these really mean grown ups on
high horses who did not want didi to marry
Chandni. They had even threatened to stop
the wedding.

to

Ritu & I tried to reason with them before
*We shall not let a woman marry another
woman, they swore.*
Riding atop their high horses
They refused to hear our voices.

I felt the rhyme allowed the story to flow more freely. It also gelled well with the metaphors and I figured would drive the layout of the visuals and text as well.

Pleased with the new development, I reworked the entire script to a rhyming story. It would be engaging for the child and repetition would also help in retention of the message.

6. VISUALISATION

Illustrating the story

- 6.1. Storyboard
- 6.2. Layout & text
- 6.3. Exploration in illustration style
- 6.4. The chosen direction

Storyboard & Script

Placing the text alongside the thumbnails helped me control and shape the flow of the entire story more easily.

In addition, the rough thumbnails helped me predict the number of illustrations(pages) I would be required to make for the book.

For my first draft, my storyboard had 36 visuals. Deepa felt that it would be too long a story for a children's book. She felt 16 pages would be perfect but I could even extend it to 20 if required. After reworking the script to rhyme and thumbnailing further, I reached a total of exactly 20 frames.



01
Little Ayesha is all excited. She is travelling with her Mama & Papa to her favourite cousin Ritu didi's home.



02
“Today is didi's wedding day and I am going to dance in her baraat!”



03
Ayesha remembers all the fun she had at the last wedding and is looking forward to it again.



04
But most of all she is excited to meet Chandni didi - Ritu didi's soon to-be wife.

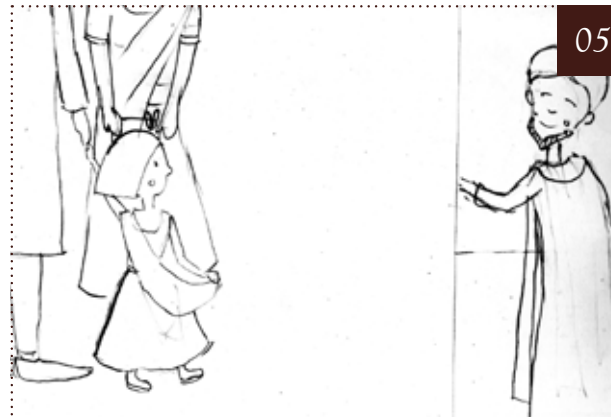
Storyboard & Script

Initial plot device was that Ayesha does not know Ritu is marrying a woman and how she is surprised about it and questions it along the way. However, after doing a qualitative analysis of the responses from parents, I felt it would be out of character for Ayesha's parents to not have told her about it prior to bringing her to the wedding. Also, I took into consideration the inquisitive and questioning nature of kids and brought in the change that Ayesha is aware that a woman loving a woman is another kind of love. She accepts it but does not understand why the rest of the society cannot.

A conversation between Ayesha & Charu Chachi on seeing none of her relatives around.

"Hi Chachi, where is everyone?
Why have they not yet come?"

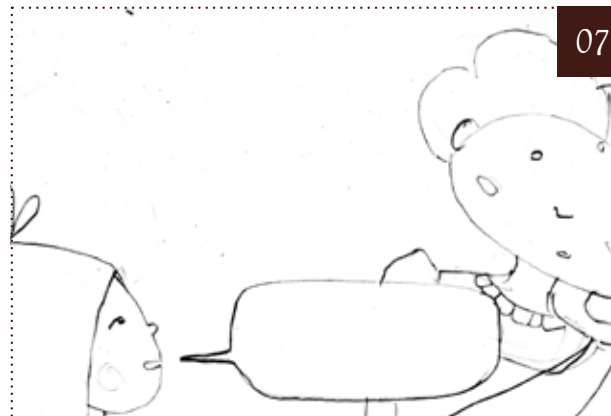
"They are not too happy, maybe
To see Ritu marry another lady."



Soon, they reach didi's house. A few guests are around but Ayesha can't recognise any of them.



She finally spots a familiar face - Charu chachi, and hops towards her to greet her.



A conversation with the sceptical Charu Chachi.



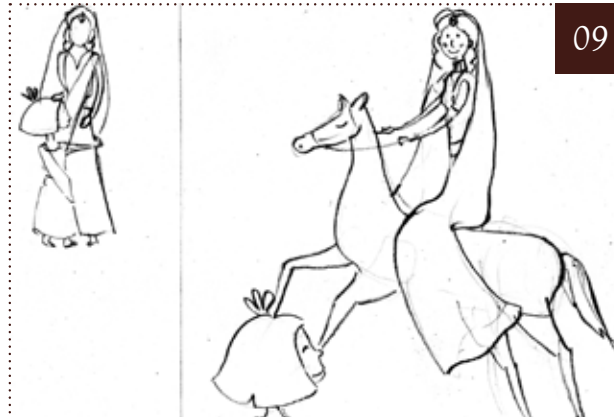
Who is the Moral Brigade?

Storyboard & Script

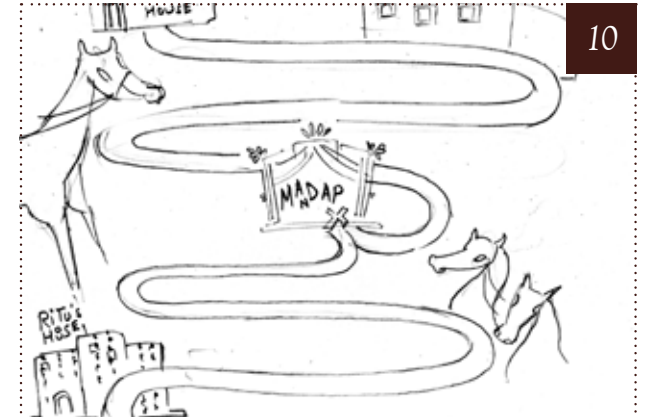
At every point of the book the baraat and the same-sex wedding, in general meets resistance from the Indian society. Be it the relatives who did not even attend, the neighbours who wished misfortune upon the bride or the Moral Brigade who try to intimidate the baraatis. Ayesha questions this resistance and tries to make sense of why they are not in support when all her didi is doing is marrying a person she loves & not hurting anyone along the way.

Ayesha on hearing the neighbours abuse and curse the bride.

“These words of venom they spew
Are making didi feel sad & blue
Chachi, I do not understand why
On this day, they want to make her cry”



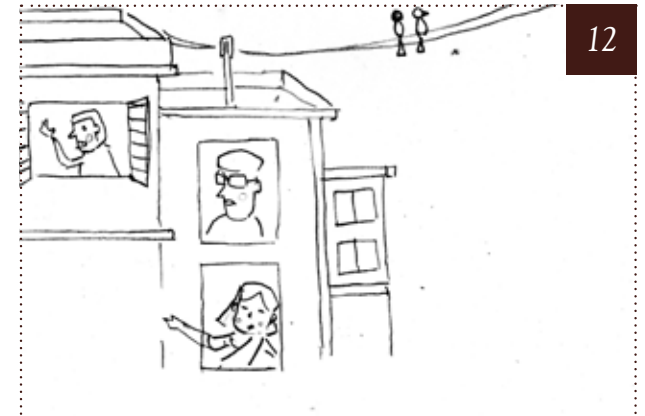
Ritu arrives and meets with Ayesha. Ritu is riding in her baraat on a horse.



A playful map (infographic) showing the route to the mandap from both the brides' houses.



The baraat proceeds. The neighbours are not happy.



They attack with sharp words made of knives.

3 of 5

Storyboard & Script

Ayesha is scared on seeing the Moral Brigade.
Her mother eases her fear.

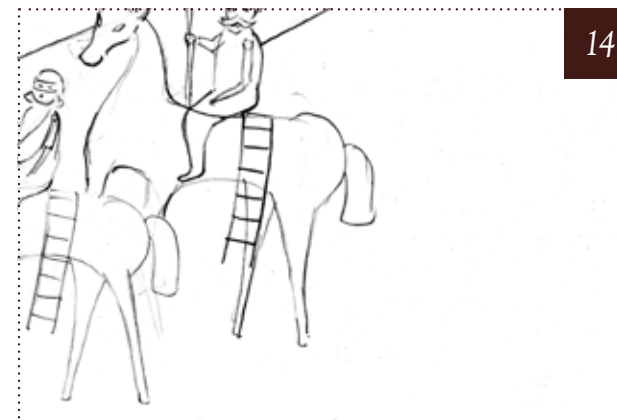
“Ayesha, don’t be afraid.
Let them not rain on our parade
You see, it is they who fear
The unfamiliar and the queer”

The wrath of the Moral Brigade.

“We warned you from the start.
No bride shall have her baraat
In peace, you shall not proceed
if you set upon this misdeed”



The Moral Brigade are here, riding atop their high horses.



They look down upon the baraat and make them feel very small.



The Moral Brigade attacks the baraat with rotten food.



The barrage of rotten veggies and eggs continues.

Storyboard & Script

Ayesha saves the day.

“Today is my didi’s wedding day
And I am going to dance in her baraat, come
what may!”

And dance she did.

Ritu smiled, and so did Chandni.
The other baraatīs too danced with much glee.

Their clothes were spoiled
But their spirit remained unbroken.

The wedding takes place despite all the
resistance. The brides are happy, & so are their
families and friends who chose to attend and
support them. Ayesha is elated now that she
has two didis, who love each other so much.

I was really keen on a happy ending for the
book. My peers and faculty remarked that the
ending was very Bollywood-like and perhaps
unrealistic in a way. But I chose to embrace it,
after all, Bollywood is a major part of the lingua
franca of our present society.



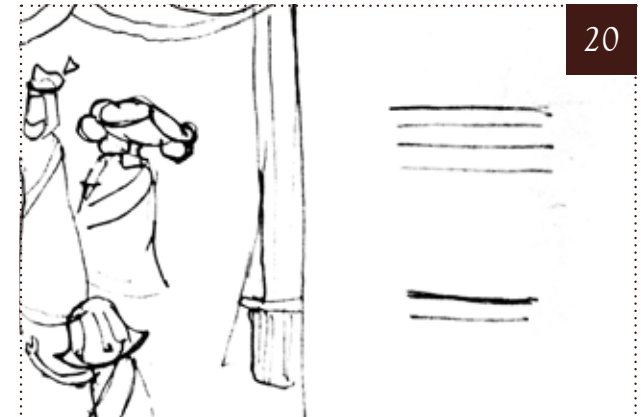
The baraatīs are upset, their clothes are spoiled.
Chandni’s baraat has met a similar fate.



Ayesha begins to dance and lifts their spirit up. The
Moral Brigade stand still dumbstruck.



The wedding takes place.



Everyone is happy. Ayesha is happy for both her didis.



The early illustrations used a plethora of colours. I personally felt that it lacked a coherency in style and colour palette. While they looked appealing, I needed a consistent style throughout, so I continued with the exploration in the other panels.

Layout & text

Alongside the storyboard frames, I placed text boxes and tried to play with the layout. I wanted the text to be expressive, organic with a handwritten feel to it.

I also wanted to explore the aesthetic of the typical Indian wedding invitations with cursive text & decorative borders, and somehow incorporate those in the layout as well.

Chandni
didi



Exploration in illustration style

For the illustrations, I opted to play to my strengths and create flat vector graphics on Adobe Illustrator. I tried different styles & incorporated in textures and patterns to bring an Indianness to the design. (Styles 1 & 2)

The watercolour backgrounds, I felt, were clashing with the flat vectors and would not have looked appealing in the printed form.

I decided to limit the number of colours and see how that would play out. The transparencies were eliminated and the result was a more refined flat visual (Style 3). As I was also exploring the possibility of using screen printing & tinted paper for the book, I proceeded with Style 3.

Style 2



*Little Ayesha
is all excited.
She is traveling
with her
Mama and Papa
to her favourite
cousin Rita
didi's home.*

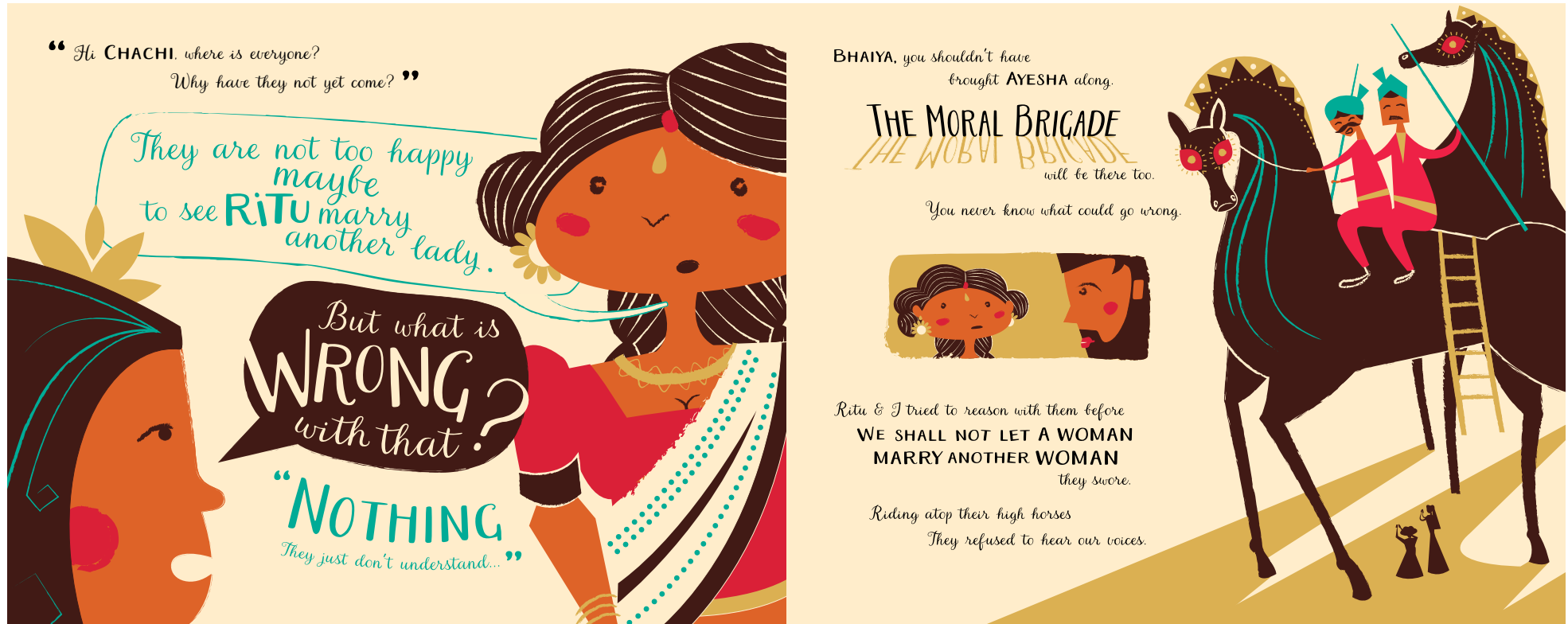
Style 1



Style 3



The chosen direction



.....

Addition of hints of teal complemented the warm tones of the colour scheme. One might associate the rainbow colours with the LGBT movement but I felt that it was a very Western aesthetic and symbolism. I deviated from the same and tried to put forth my own spin on it. When printed, the gold would stand out (foil-stamp) and exude the celebratory mood of the occasion.

7. PRODUCTION

Printing the book

7.1. Title of the book

7.2. Book size

7.3. Production

Title of the book

With the story in place and work on the illustrations underway, I had to pay attention to the other details of the book, like the name of the book. I had a few titles which kept running in my head like *Ritu ki shaadi* (Ritu's wedding), *Ritu ki dulhaan* (Ritu's bride), *Ritu ki aayegi baraat* (Here comes Ritu's baraat) etc. However, I was not entirely satisfied with any of these names. Also, they perhaps resembled Bollywood film titles in a way. For a book written in English, the titles would perhaps alienate my intended audience. I decided to go back to my study of other LGBT children's books and see how they approached the naming for the book.

A majority of these books made it obvious from the start that the book is on same-sex love. As these books follow the parenting approach, and features two-mom or two-dad families, it would be addressed in the title itself. Often, it is from the perspective of the child and how the child distinguishes both the parents of the same sex from each other with different names. The biological parent is typically addressed as mom/dad (and their variants) while the other parent may be addressed by their first name in rare cases.

A few of the titles:

- Mommy, Mama & Me
- Daddy, Papa & Me
- Uncle Bobby's Wedding (Uncle Bobby & Jamie)
- Daddy's Roommate (Dad & Frank)

In some cases, the name of the child is incorporated in the book title.

- Heather has Two Mommies
- Asha's Mums

I wished to be as explicit in naming my book as well. There had to be no room for ambiguity. The title itself should giveaway that the book features same-sex love. I figured if I bring in the other bride's name in the title as well, it would make a huge difference. I narrowed down the potential titles to 'The Two Brides' & 'Ritu & Chandni's wedding'. Some of my peers pointed out that there was still some ambiguity at play, as Ritu & Chandni could be two sisters getting married on the same day in the same mandap. To clear that, I finally arrived to the book title- **Ritu weds Chandni.**

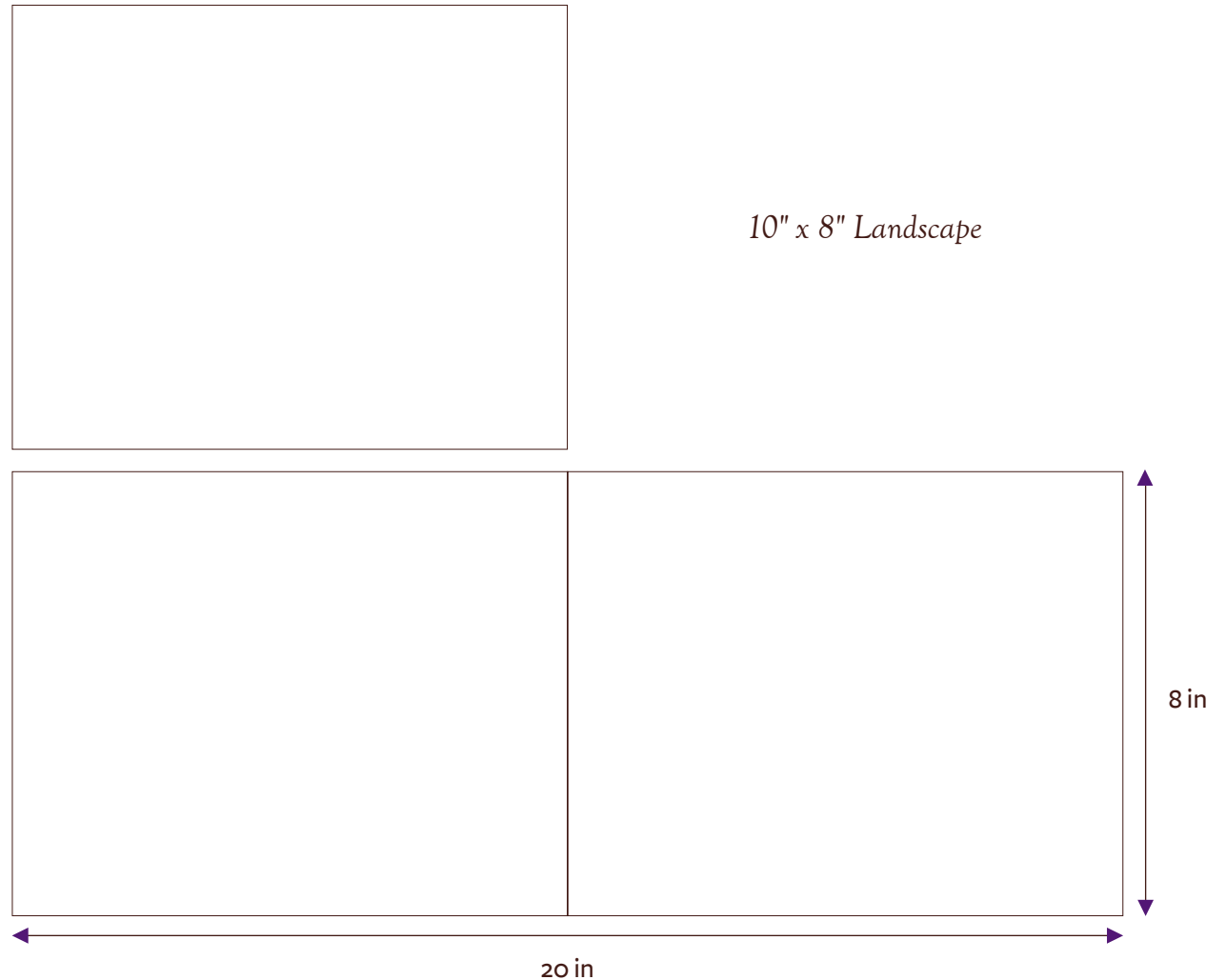
Ritu weds Chandni. I felt I could not be more explicit in stating the content of the book with this title. The title is also a nod to the typical Indian wedding invitations with the name of the groom & bride written in a running script, which also forms the base for the imagery and style of the inner pages.



Size of the book

When I began thumbnailing, I had a fair idea about the orientation of the book. A landscape layout would give me a wider scope for illustrating a baraat (the procession) as they travel through the city. A vertical layout would have limited the same.

Next part was determining the size for the book. I looked at my own collection of children's books gathered over the years and also the industry standards for such books. After perusing the books, I realised it varied from publisher to publisher, and no hard and fast rule existed for a particular size. However, **10" x 8" landscape format** seemed to be a common size for horizontal books, and on further study I realised it is an industry standard recommended for mass production.



Two page spreads give a wider scope for illustrating a procession of people.

Printing

Taking into consideration the aesthetic I was aiming for and the limited colour illustrations; I felt screen printing would be an appropriate printing method.

Counting all the visuals and the story the book has 20 pages. After adding the title page, foreword, author's note, acknowledgement, etc, the number of print pages would be 28.

For a sample copy, it shall be digitally printed on a pale sand tinted paper approx. 150 gsm.

The book would be centre pinned and hard cover bound with a paper jacket.

CONCLUSION

Scope for publishing

Major publications will be paranoid when faced with a book on such an issue specially if its intended for children. With the sword of sec 377 hanging overhead, there would be concerns if a published work shall count as an abetment of sec 377. Also, unlike their book counterpart, the real life Moral Brigade is truly dangerous and have resorted to violence and book burnings in the past.

An alternative channel

With the current situation in the country, it seems apt to also look at some non-traditional means of distribution.

- **Self-publishing on a social platform**
Children's author & illustrator Dallas Clayton after being rejected by various publishers, went on to publish his book on the web. It gained popularity and he consequently became a bestselling author.
- **Distribution through NGOs**
There are several LGBT organisations across the country who work with LGBT youth. While, my target age group does

not fall in their immediate outreach, they do create safe spaces for the community with their library on queer resources for youth and their families.

- **Queer Publishers**
There are a number of small queer-friendly publication houses in India who may perhaps print & stock the books in their stores - Queer Ink & Yoda Press.
- **Magazines**
The Gaysi Zine from gaysifamily.com is a printed publication of queer stories & art.

There are kids who are aware of their sexual orientation early on, and who have difficulty fitting in. Or perhaps they know of someone who is undergoing the same. For this handful, they need to see these familiar faces and themes in our stories. Every small bit of representation helps. I hope my small contribution towards this struggle shall reach those concerned and help us move towards a more inclusive society.

What if you don't know the role you're playing
Or your story isn't in the tales you've heard
Well it means your character is still unwritten
And it's up to you to fill the page with words

Dallas Clayton,
children's book author & illustrator

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books:

Alexander, J. *Introduction to the Special Issue: Queer Webs: Representations of LGBT People and Communities on the World Wide Web*. International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies, 2002, Volume 7, Number 2-3, Page 77.. Springer Science+Business Media

Patil, A. (2008) *Kari*. HarperCollins Publishers India

Pattanaik, D. (2014). *Shikhandi: and Other Stories They Don't Tell You*. Penguin India

Richardson, J, Parnell, P & Cole, H. (2005) *And Tango Makes Three*. Simon & Schuster

Sankar, H. (2014). *Talking of Muskaan*. Duckbill Books

Sunderland, J., & McGlashan, M. (2010). *Stories featuring Two-Dad & Two-Mum families*. Language, Gender and Children's Fiction. A&C Black

Podcasts:

Weisz, B. (2013, April 21). *Don't say gay! Introducing children to alternative sexualities*. Pod Academy. Retrieved from <http://podacademy.org/podcasts/dont-say-gay/>

Misc references:

Akhtar, Z. (2013). *Sheila ki Jawaani*. Bombay Talkies. [motion picture]. Flying Unicorn Entertainment

Hat. (2015). *The Importance Of LGBT Visibility: Why I Want Everyone To Know I'm Gay*. Retrieved from <http://www.tickld.com/x/lgbt/the-importance-of-lgbt-visibility>

Wikipedia. (2015). *Gay literature*. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gay_literature#Children.27s_fiction

Online Documents:

Maheshwari, V. (2015). *Same Sex Marriage: Is It The Time For Legal Recognition*. Legal Service India. Retrieved from <http://www.legalserviceindia.com/articles/semar.htm>

Sarasvati, S. (2015, March 28). *How LGBTs Should Go About It*. Swarajya Mag. Retrieved from <http://swarajyamag.com/culture/lgbt-rights-this-is-how-to-go-about-it/>

Sarasvati, S. (2015, April 18). *Need for Diverse LGBT Role Models*. Swarajya Mag. Retrieved from <http://swarajyamag.com/culture/need-for-diverse-lgbt-role-models/>

The Humsafar Trust. (2015). *Mission Azaadi Document. An Advocacy Reference Manual for LGBTQH(Lesbian , Gay , Bisexual, Transgender, Queer & Hijra) groups in India*. Retrieved from http://issuu.com/thehumsafartrust3/docs/mad_final

Web Articles:

Bahuguna, M. (2013, Dec 11). *Indian Lesbian Wedding: A Beautiful Love Story*. BollywoodShaadis. Retrieved from <http://www.bollywoodshaadis.com/articles/indian-lesbian-wedding-a-beautiful-love-story-2432>

Berk, B. (2009). *Where Are The Gay Classics? The past, present and future of kid books and TV where not everyone is straight*. Babble. Retrieved from <http://www.babble.com/kid/gay-characters-in-kids-books-heather-has-two-mommies/>

Dawson, J. (2014, May 13). *The importance of LGBT visibility in children's books*. The Guardian. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2014/may/13/james-dawson-importance-lgbt-gay-visibility-childrens-book>

Dawson, J. (2014, May 14). *How to use books to create safe spaces for young LGBT people*. The Guardian. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2014/may/14/james-dawson-best-lgbt-books-for-book-groups>

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Drabble, E. (2014, May 12). *Welcome to our LGBT themed week - an overview*. The Guardian. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2014/may/12/lgbt-books-week-childrens-books-teenagers-ya>

H., (2011, July 31). *Gay @ IITB: Out and About*. InsIghT, IIT Bombay. Retrieved from <http://www.insightitb.org/2011/gayitb-out-and-about/>

Harper, R. (2011, July 31). *National Coming Out Day and Achieving Progress Through Visibility*. The Huffington Post. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robyn-harper/national-coming-out-day-a_b_1956574.html

Johri, V. (2015, June 29). *Why gay marriage is way out of India's reach*. Dailyo.in. Retrieved from <http://www.dailyo.in/politics/lgbtq-usa-supreme-court-same-sex-marriage-love-wins-justice-kennedy/story/1/4649.html>

Karkera, A. (2015, July 17). *Why India Is Not Yet Ready For Gay Marriage*. The Huffington Post. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.in/aditya-karkera/why-india-is-not-yet-read_b_7681830.html

Kohler, S. (2014, June 6). *On the Importance of Fairy Tales*. Psychology Today. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/dreaming-freud/201406/the-importance-fairy-tales>

Lowe, F. (2014, April 23). *One Book to Change Them All*. Advocate.com. Retrieved from <http://www.advocate.com/parenting/2014/04/23/one-book-change-them-all>

marnie. (2013, April 10). *Gay Penguins and Heather Has Two Mommies - Pushing the gay agenda on Kindergardeners*. Sexplainer.com. Retrieved from <http://www.sexplainer.com/2013/04/10/gay-penguins-and-heather-has-two-mommies-pushing-the-gay-agenda-on-kindergardeners/>

Motihar, K. (2015, March 17). *6 Things To Learn From This Indian Lesbian Wedding*. BollywoodShaadis. Retrieved from <http://www.bollywoodshaadis.com/articles/6-things-to-learn-from-this-indian-lesbian-wedding-2151>

Nadya. (2014, June 13). *10 Lovely Desi LGBT Weddings in Honor of {National Pride Month}*. The Big Fat Indian Wedding. Retrieved from <http://thebigfatindianwedding.com/2014/10-lovely-desi-lgbt-weddings-in-honor-of-national-pride-month>

Pattanaik, D. (2015, May 31). *Where were the lesbians on Independence Day?*. Mid-Day. Retrieved from <http://www.mid-day.com/articles/where-were-the-lesbians-on-independence-day/16252179>

Popova, M. (2015, Feb 16). *The Best LGBT Children's Books: A Sweet and Assuring Celebration of Diversity and Difference*. Brain Pickings. Retrieved from <https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/02/16/best-lgbt-childrens-books/>



Project II

**The visibility & representation of LGBT
(Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender)
in Indian society**

July - Nov 2015

Ameya Narvankar

146250007

M. Des 2014 -2016

Visual Communication

IDC, IIT Bombay